



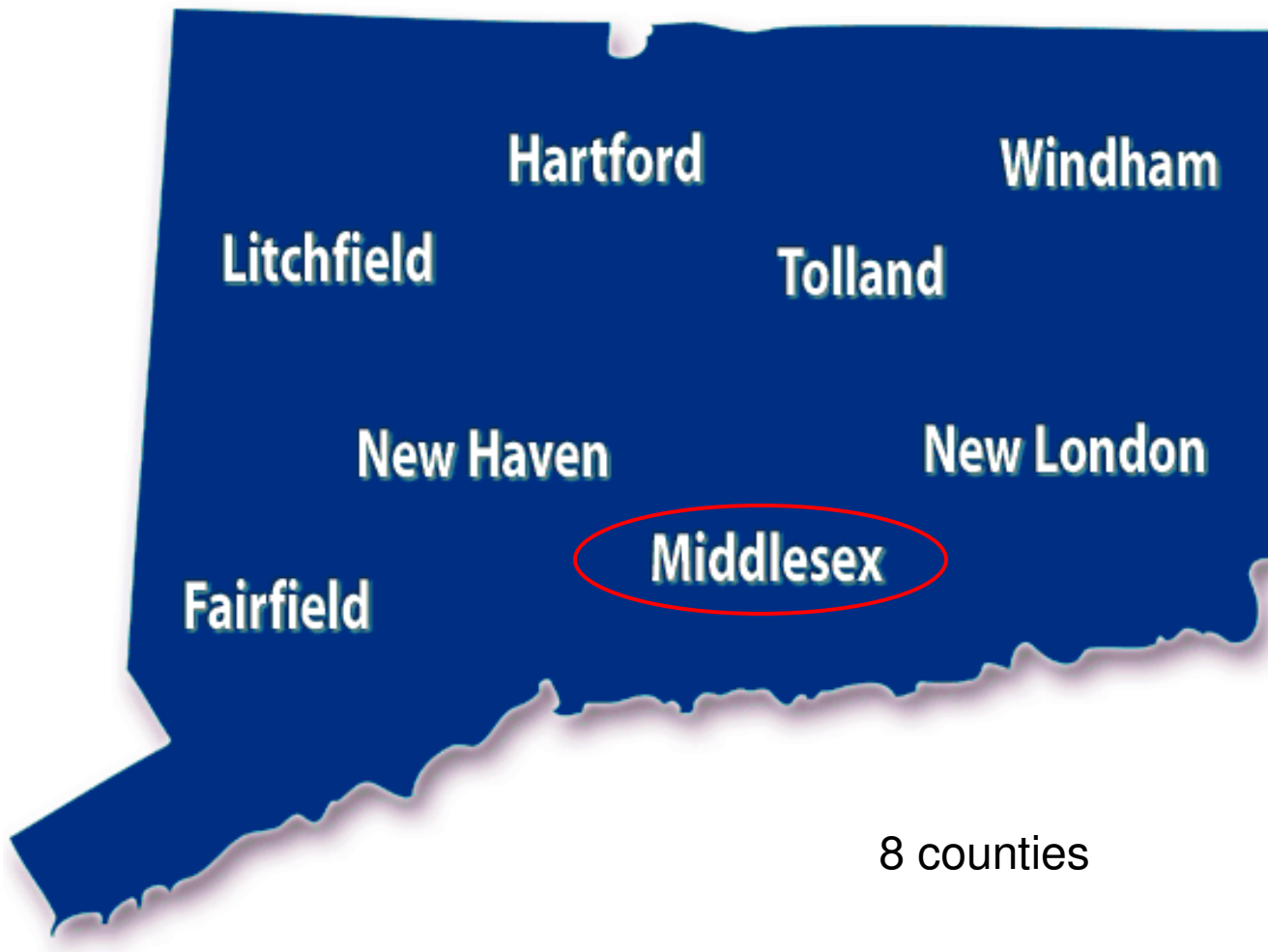
Future of Middlesex County

**Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce -
Young Professionals' Alliance**

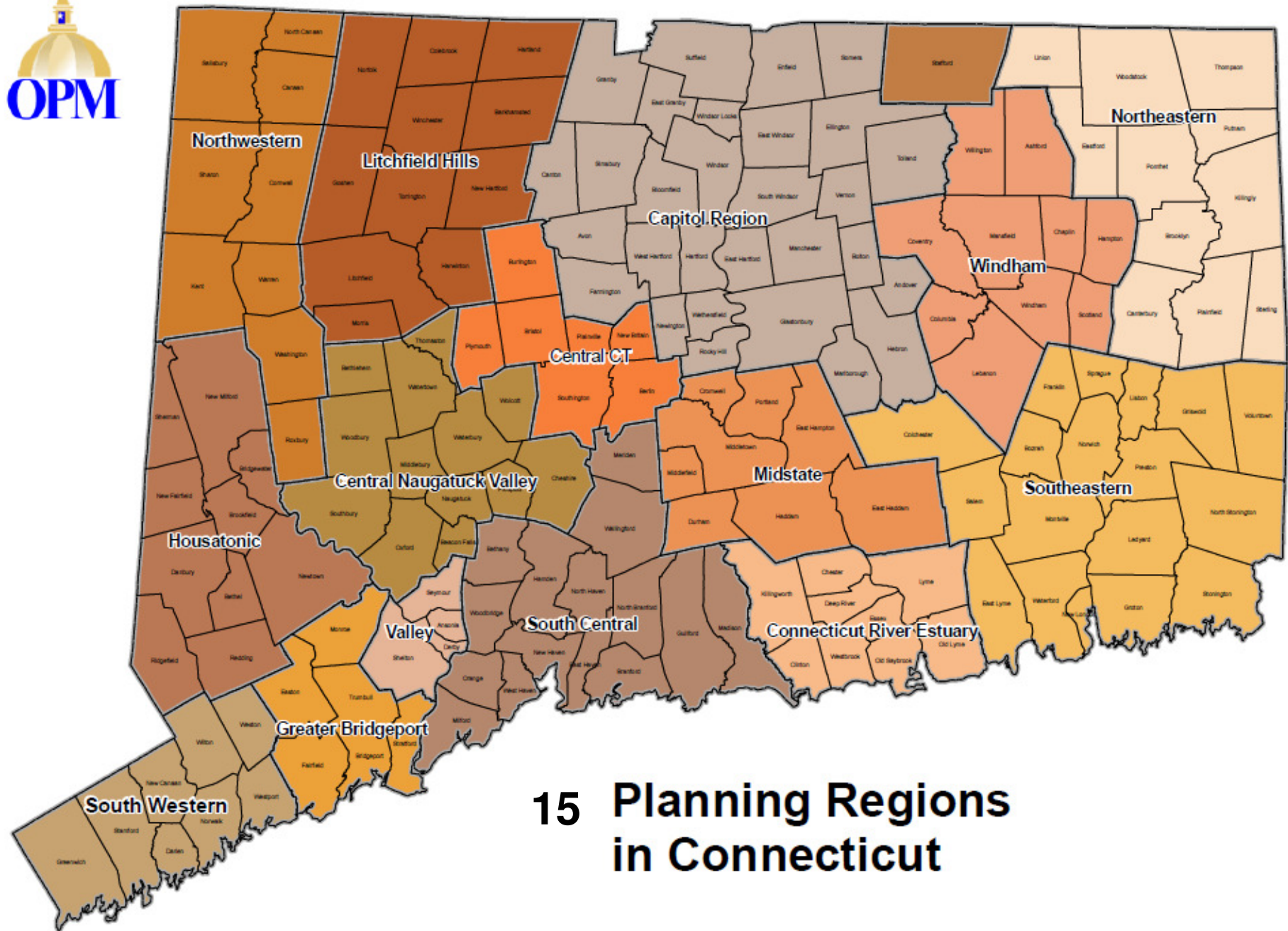
**William Warner, AICP
Director of Planning, Conservation & Development
Middletown, CT
September 29th, 2010**



Middlesex County

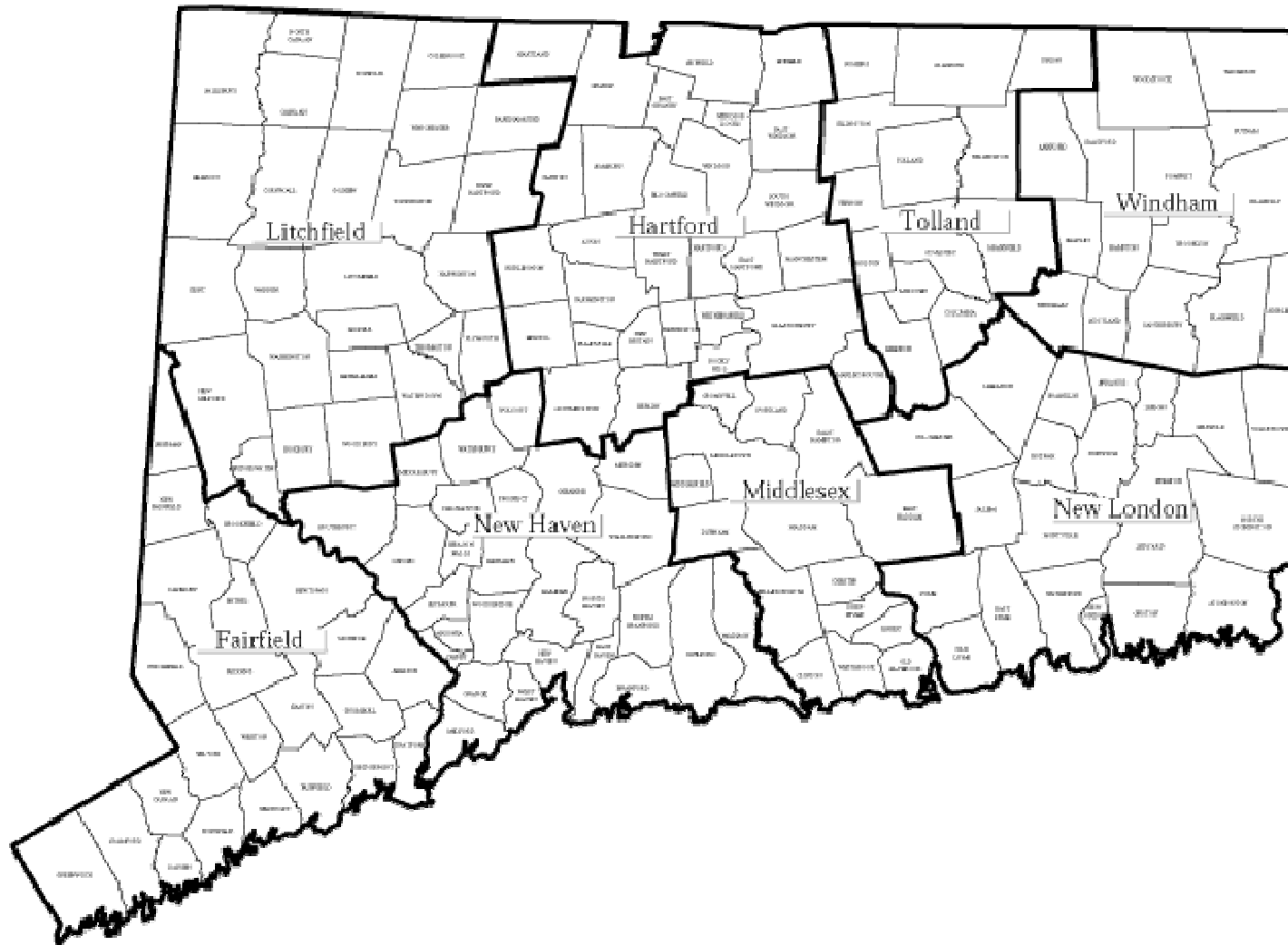


8 counties



15 Planning Regions in Connecticut

169 Towns





Current Situation

- 169 towns not efficient
- Too much overlap and duplication
- 169 Legislative bodies, 169 P&Z Commissions, 169 Public Works Departments etc...
- Land use approval process is long, inefficient, and unfriendly
- Young people and seniors that are able are leaving at record pace
- Businesses do not consider CT a desirable location



Current Situation

- Some of poorest cities in the nation
- Cities have disproportionate share of poverty, affordable housing, special needs, social services and tax exempt property
- Huge disparities in educational achievement, income, crime rates
- Albany Ave. Hartford – West Hartford - \$17,000 - \$84,000
- Towns too dependent on local property tax
- As cities and small towns run out of developable land they can't expand grand list
- Can't grow, can't generate tax revenue to provide services to a largely dependent population
- In poorer communities land use decisions are driven by the desire to expand grand list
- Cities become more and more dependent on state revenue



Push for Regionalism

- Support failing cities
- Larger region larger tax base
- Eliminate dependency on local property tax
- Deliver more efficient services



Regionalism

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- Shared expertise – grant writing
- Larger organizations are more competitive in seeking federal grants
- More consistency in planning, land use, education policies, taxation, and all other public services
- Potentially less bureaucracy
- Some issues can't be confined to town boundaries, transportation, utilities, or solid waste
- Larger, more efficient government
- Less duplication of services
- Entire region benefits from development in one town
- Regional tax base sharing – spread the wealth



Regionalism

Advantages and Disadvantages

Disadvantages

- Smaller government is more accountable and responsive
- Home rule allows for local decision making on education, taxation, spending, and land use
- Residents know the decision makers
- Significant influence over decision making
- Larger government is less accountable, less responsive to the public



- Quiet movement at legislature to force regional cooperation and decision making

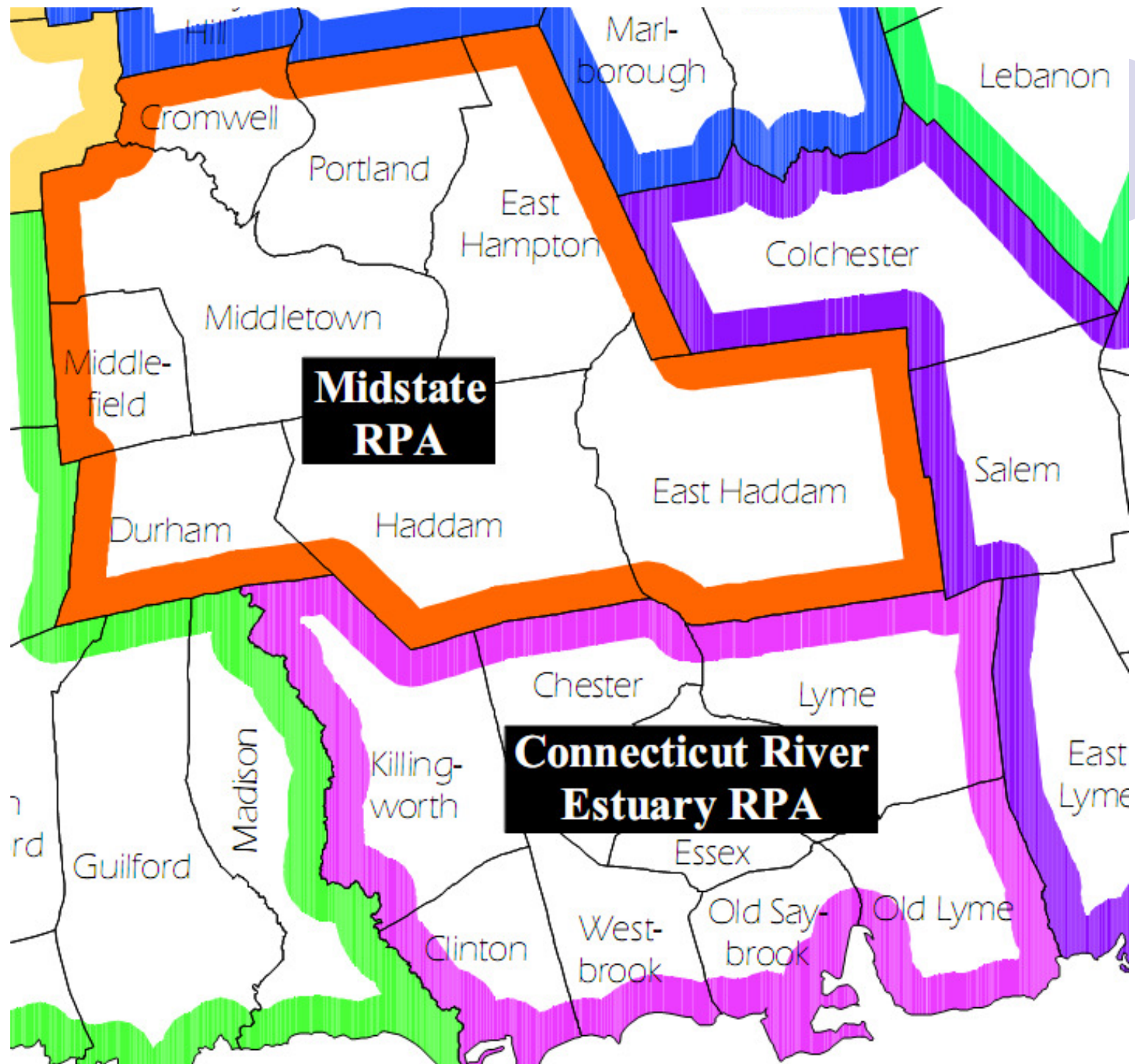
Two examples

- Plan of Conservation and Development
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies

Can Middlesex County be a viable region?

**Cromwell
Portland
East Hampton
Middletown
Middlefield
Durham
Haddam
East Haddam
Killingworth
Chester
Deep River
Essex
Clinton
Westbrook
Old Saybrook**





Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce



What Middlesex County Offers

- Middlesex County United Way
- Middlesex County YMCA
- Regional health care system through Middlesex Hospital
- Vibrant downtowns, small town charm
- Essex steam train and river boat
- World class arts and cultural offerings – Wesleyan and Goodspeed
- Rich in history, historic structures, town greens and museums
- Scenic roads, orchards and farms
- Beaches, lakes, and the Connecticut River
- Outlet shopping to specialty stores
- Metro North - spread of Fairfield county wealth
- Interstate 95 and Route 9
- Unlike most counties - a strong central city in Middletown

Middlesex County's - Central City Middletown

Biggest drivers in the decline of cities are poverty, crime, and high taxes.

- Unlike most cities - Middletown works
- Middletown has a very large land area, room to grow.

Hartford 17 sq.mi, New Haven 18 sq.mi. New Britain 13 sq.mi,
Meriden 23 sq.mi.

- Middletown deals with poverty and crime very well, with a strong social service network and affordable housing
- Middletown's grand list is diversified and taxes are competitive with the rest of the county



“We may be biased but we think downtown Middletown is the place to be. The city we affectionately refer to as “mini New Haven” has everything the bigger cities have to offer – culture, dining, shopping, luxury accommodations, a high ranking university.”

Connecticut Magazine, April 2009



Great Press and Recognition

*Middletown ranks #6 in the
“Top Ten of New England Main Streets”*

Boston Globe’s ExploreNewEngland.com

*Main Street’s “Restaurant Row” “...the small
City of Middletown, Connecticut, packs more
international flavor on its Main Street than
places four times its size.”*

Yankee Magazine, November 2005

*“Middletown boasts the
most robust community
arts programming I’ve
seen in this state...
there’s something about
being within walking
distance of 5 to 10
separate, simultaneous
performances that
makes you feel like
you’re in the middle of
something hot.”*

*Dan Barry – Hartford
Advocate
December 2007*

*“The comeback of Main
Street is a victory of both
good sense and good
planning; Good sense for
emphasizing public safety
first; good planning for
picking a viable goal,
sticking with it and using a
lot of imagination to make it
happen.”*

*Tom Condon
Hartford Courant
October 2006*

*“Middletown continues
to surprise as it evolves
into an interesting
restaurant town with a
wide choice of cuisines,
consistently better than
average food and the
only known Tibetan
restaurant in the state.”*

*New York Times
June 2006*

Conclusion

- The county has all the attributes to be a successful region
- Middlesex County can work together to be the best in CT
- Must be voluntary cooperation
- State can't force regional cooperation
- Must at the same time preserve local autonomy





How to Get There

- Combine two Regional Planning Agencies into one Council of Governments (COG)
- Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) successful model
- Formal organization with board made up of Chief Elected Officials
- Committees of Public Works Directors, Police Chiefs, School Superintendents, and Planners meet to discuss ways to operate more efficiently
- Communication is key